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Lifetimes of Disposability and Surplus Entrepreneurs in Bagong Barrio, Manila

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Abstract: Working in collaboration with Migrante International and drawing on testimony of residents in the remittance-dependent, migrant-sending community of Bagong Barrio in Caloocan City in Metro Manila, Philippines, we examine the systematic production of lifetimes of disposability that drives labour migration across the generations. The closure of factories and contractualisation of work in the 1980s created the conditions in which labour migration is not a choice but a necessity. Diligent use of remittances to pay for the education of their children in many cases has produced a new generation of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), and investment in housing often is another route to OFW status. Alongside this narrative of ongoing precarity, we listen closely to the testimony of residents for ways of living that are both subsumed within and somewhat excessive to accounts that might render their lives as merely waste or wasted.

Abstrak: Sa tulong ng Migrante International at gamit ang ilang kwento ng mga residenteng patuloy na umaasa sa remittance o padala ng kanilang mga kamag anak na OFW, aming sisiyasatin sa papel na ito ang sistematikong produksyon ng tinatawag ni Neferti Tadiar na “life-times of disposability” na siyang nagtutulak sa pangingibang bansa ng libo libong Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) mula sa Bagong Barrio, isang barangay sa lungsod ng Caloocan, Maynila. Sa lugar na ito, ang pagsasara ng maraming pabrika at kontraktwalisasyon nung 1980s ay siyang nagtulak sa marami upang maghanap ng trabaho sa ibang bansa. Para sa mga residente ng Bagong Barrio na aming napanayam, ang pagalis ng Pilipinas para sa hanap buhay ay hindi lamang isang personal na pagpapasiya. Isa itong kasagutan sa matinding pangangailangan. Bukod pa rito, karamihan sa mga OFW, sa tulong na rin ng kanilang mga kamag anak ay napipilitang gamitin ang remittance para sa pagaaral ng mga anak o sa pagbili ng lupa at bahay bilang puhunan para sa kanilang mga anak, ang susunod na henerasyon ng OFW sa kanilang pamilya. Sa kontekstong ito ng pawang na siklo ng pangingibang bansa, nais naming pakinggang mabuti ang mga kwento ng mga residente ng Bagong Barrio upang mabigyang pansin ang iba pang uri ng pamumuhay na kontra sa karaniwang pagtingin sa buhay ng Pilipinong migrante, na ito ay nasasayang lamang o isa nang patapon na buhay.

Keywords: disposability, surplus populations, labour migration, social reproduction, neoliberalism, precarity

What long-term residents remember about Bagong Barrio from the 1960s and 1970s are vacant fields of tall weeds, mud, the absence of basic infrastructure, smells and garbage: “people would just wrap their shit and throw it in your backyard”.¹ North of central Manila and not yet incorporated into the metropolitan area (see Figure 1), the site was one of the region’s largest garbage dumps, an area referred to as *Pugad Baboy* (which translates as swine’s nest or pig fields). When informal settlers began to arrive, it was a place where garbage was thrown and people were literally salvaged, that is, killed and/or discarded.² Early settlers at that time were themselves a kind of excess. Some were displaced from informal settlements located in the Intramuros and Sampaloc areas in central Manila: “when we were asked to leave [Intramuros], we moved here”.³ Others came from poor rural areas from northern and other provinces. Bagong Barrio became a squatter’s settlement of mostly shanty housing, where residents lined up with pails at 4 am to fetch water from the well of the local “business man of water”.

After Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos established the National Housing Authority (NHA) in 1975, an infrastructure of roads, sewage and electricity was slowly developed, and in 1980 Imelda Marcos came to Bagong Barrio during a local election, in her capacity as the Governor of the Metro Manila Commission. She sang the song *Dahil Sa Iyo* [Because of You] and promised residents: “I will give you this land”.⁴ Succeeding Presidents have persisted with this promise of land-titling, more recently President Arroyo in 2005 during her “de Soto tour” of poor communities in Metro Manila on the fourth anniversary of EDSA 2 (four days of political protest in 2001 that ousted then President Estrada).⁵ Despite these efforts to solidify the settlement, economies of excess and disposability persist in Bagong Barrio, and, in many ways, residents remain a surplus population. The slow temporality of neoliberalism in the Philippines over the last half century has created, in Neferti Tadiar’s (2013:38) phrasing, lifetimes of disposability⁶ and the conditions for permanent, intergenerational stagnation among large populations, a phenomenon perceived not as “an event” or “immanent fate” but “simply a[n enduring] mode of life”. A part of this enduring temporality of disposability has been the respatialisation of family life through the massive expansion of labour migration.

Drawing on periods of fieldwork in Bagong Barrio in 2014 and 2015, and working in collaboration with Migrante International, a migrant advocacy organisation, we focus here on the persistent intergenerational reproduction of entrenched precarity, and ongoing spatial economies of liquidity and disposability.⁷ Lifetimes of disposability evidence suffering, in Povinelli’s phrasing, that is “ordinary, chronic and cruddy rather than catastrophic, crisis-laden, and sublime”. Being less “eventful”, this suffering is, she argues, less susceptible to the “ethical impulse” (2011:3–4). But documenting the temporality of intergenerational precarity opens critical opportunities as well. As Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) argues, sacrificial redemption is a technique of social tense that is often deployed to explain (away) social harm. A close appraisal of the repetition of disposability across generations puts a lie to this mode of deflection, used in the global North and South alike to legitimate labour migration,



Figure 1: Bagong Barrio West within Metro Manila (prepared by Eric Leinberger, Department of Geography, UBC)

because it makes clear that sacrifice in the past and present is unlikely to be redeemed in the future.

Precarity in Bagong Barrio is produced within the specifics of Philippine history: a history of Spanish and American colonialism, integration within the global capitalist economy through partnerships with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, an export-oriented industrial development strategy that has subjected the

population to the effects of various structural adjustment policies (Bello et al. 2005; Raphael 2000; San Juan 2000, 2009; Tadiar 2009), and a home-grown version of crony capitalism, or what Paul Hutchcroft (1998) describes as booty capitalism. This history has been shadowed by a vigorous urban restructuring program for Manila during the Marcos era (the City of Man), accompanied by substantial urban dispossession: namely, the removal, containment, concealment and relocation of squatters (Benedicto 2014; Garrido 2013; Pinches 1994; Tadiar 2009; Tolentino 2001). Rather than waste to which the state is indifferent,⁸ in the Philippines, through a labour export program that dates from 1974, segments of this “disposable” population have served as valuable assets, who sustain their families and the post-colonial state through their remittances. In 2014, remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) were estimated to be US\$26.0 billion or almost 15% of the country’s GNP (Caraballo 2015; see also Guevarra 2010; Rodriguez 2010; Tadiar 2013).⁹ It is estimated that approximately 1 in 10 Philippine nationals works abroad as an OFW, between 34% and 53% of the national population depends on remittances for their daily subsistence, and at least nine million children in the Philippines (or 27% of the overall youth population) are growing up with at least one parent working overseas (Parreñas 2005a, 2005b, 2010).

Bagong Barrio is a key site in which this global drama is played out. It is both a community and point of passage or node of mobility (PATAMABA-IUP n.d.). One resident referred to the barrio as “the entry point” to labour migration; another as a “strategic place”. Indeed, migration is ubiquitous in Bagong Barrio. Everyone has a migration story to tell. It is both a direct source of OFW labour and a place where OFWs from the provinces, especially from the North, pass through while preparing their papers and attending the seminars and training courses necessary to leave as temporary labour migrants. There is good reason, then, that Migrante International is concentrating their organising efforts there, and for others to pay close attention to this community.

Precarity in Bagong Barrio is also structured in relation to other urban places. We situate our analysis of life in Bagong Barrio within ongoing calls to rethink our engagement with and the way we theorise the urban and processes of neoliberalisation, which for Ananya Roy (2009:820, 821), must “be produced *in place*” in order to re(map) the “multiplicity of metropolitan modernities”. In advocating for theory-making to emerge (as well) from within and across the global South, Roy writes that there is some urgency in tracing the “complex connections, exchanges and references through which cities (everywhere) are worlded” (2009:829; see also Brenner et al. 2010; Hall et al. 2013; Peake and Rieker 2013; Robinson 2011, 2016; Roy 2015). The worlding of cities such as Rome, Vancouver, Jeddah, Taipei, Singapore, and Hong Kong (to name just a few places heavily dependent on Filipino care workers) is intimately bound up with and only properly understood from the ground in places such as Bagong Barrio (and vice versa). Often excluded in predominant accounts of urbanisation, the varied, heterogenous urbanisms of the global South are themselves important sites of learning and theorising. Not only is the Philippine government an innovative manager of labour export, from which other labour exporting countries learn, situating one’s analysis

in Bagong Barrio refocuses theoretical perspective. In particular, some categorical distinctions that drive theory and political debate in both the global North and the Philippines make little sense from the vantage of Bagong Barrio: distinctions between economic and forced migration, informal and formal land markets, and between the entrepreneurial and wasted subjects of neoliberalism. If it is too simplistic to map the entrepreneurial subject and surplus populations onto particular places (i.e. the global North and South respectively), it is arguable that the entrepreneurial subject also takes shape differently in different places; in the Philippines, not as an individual subject of freedom and choice but as a member of a family with deep obligations of care and responsibility.¹⁰ This entrepreneurial subject might be thought of as simultaneously surplus and entrepreneur: surplus-as-entrepreneur.¹¹ At the same time, state reliance on remittances creates a distinctive relationship to the urban and rural poor, such that the Philippine state has a structural dependency on this surplus population, one that demands, not the eradication of the urban poor but the “elimination of its social contradictions by means of the latter’s infinite fragmentation or disintegration”. “Such comprises”, Tadiar argues, “the continuous system of ‘liquidation’ of the potential capital of the urban poor” (2009:210–211). We pay close attention to these processes of liquidation and the social reproduction of OFW labour that sustain the ongoing production of labour migration within the global division of labour.

Our analysis of migrant lives in Bagong Barrio draws extensively on the testimony of community residents, to whom we were introduced by (and in the company of) organisers of Migrante International.¹² This representational strategy emerges from theoretical, political and ethical concerns. Rendering individuals as mass or surplus populations, while theoretically illuminating, can replicate the processes of dehumanisation that we criticise. As Melissa Wright (2006:4) notes, “few, if any, identify themselves as the bearer of the abstract condition of disposability”. Disposable lives among surplus populations in the Philippines, vividly rendered by Neferti Tadiar as the “human rubble of global neoliberalism” (2013:33), can be brought into intelligibility in different ways, some of which repeat and deepen the devaluation of already stressed and devalued lives.¹³ Attending to both the singularity of OFWs’ experiences and the repetition of these experiences across the globe is one possible way of refusing the further devaluation of already devalued workers. Recognising the challenging politics of testimony and witnessing across the global South and North (Cubilié 2005; Mohanty 1986; Pratt 2012; Spivak 1988; Taylor 2003), we nonetheless commit to this relationship of speaking and listening in the company of Migrante International.¹⁴

So too, migrant workers are often scripted into simplifying narratives, and these narratives structure political response (Gibson et al. 2001; Tadiar 2009). OFWs are often rendered in Philippine state narratives of development as sacrificing heroes of the nation, investors and ambassadors; in feminist and human rights discourse as gendered and racialised victims of patriarchy, racism, and global uneven development; and in political economy, as surplus populations or bare life. Paying close attention to detailed life stories opens opportunities to listen beyond these established scripts. In her dissatisfaction with reductive readings of migrants

and other disposable lives in the Philippines, Tadiar (2009, 2013) reaches for what “falls away” from these accounts, for overlooked modes of social experience and social cooperation, and for forms of life-making that elude our existing narratives. “Attending to the uneven times of ‘neoliberal’ transformations through the life-times of disposability”, she writes, “opens up the possibility of other genealogies for understanding those remaindered ways of *living* in the world that move and generate that world in ways we would otherwise be unable to take into political account” (2013:43). We have tried to listen closely to what residents of Bagong Barrio told us about their lives, for ways of living that are both subsumed within and somewhat excessive to accounts that might render their lives as merely waste or wasted within global capitalism.

Forced Labour Migration and Living Precariously

In the 1970s and 1980s, Bagong Barrio was a community surrounded by 70 or so unionised factories in which many residents worked. The factories, mostly Chinese and Filipino owned, were largely dedicated to the manufacture of clothing, footwear, plastics and tires. Remembering the union activism and widespread civil unrest before and during the turbulent years of martial law (1972–1981) under President Marcos, Marilou, a long-term community organiser with PAMBU, an organisation of the working poor, recalled:

The Care Jeans [factory] is where I spent nights on strike in the picket area. All of that I already wrote down [but lost] because, when this area became a hot spot, we had to bury those papers. We organised many workers ... The nuns. The priests. We were there with [the strikers] because they were already being harassed. It was real ... When the police were there, and when night comes, or early morning, they would destroy the picket line. They would have things to hit you with. It hurt. We would be sleeping and resting ... Then, suddenly, goons would approach. But, when the workers were organised and educated, they would fight. They would stand up. They would rebuild the picket area. They would continue. Continuous. They fought the struggle.

Residents active in the labour movement at the time estimate that the Bagong Barrio Labor Alliance had between 10,000 and 20,000 members in the 1970s and early 1980s, and “whenever there was a mobilisation, it was easy to get 7,000 workers to come”.¹⁵ Organisers considered Bagong Barrio to be a base for mobilising the urban poor in the 1980s and even the 1990s.¹⁶ Substantial union organising did not, however, halt the closing of factories in the surrounding area, which began around 1983, and labour conditions in Bagong Barrio deteriorated further after the passage of the Herrera Law in 1989.¹⁷ Enacted during the Aquino presidency (1986–1992), this law created the legal grounds for contractualisation and police/military intervention in workers’ strikes. Through the 1980s, many regularised workers in Bagong Barrio were ejected from their factory jobs as contractual hiring was outsourced to labour agencies (Ofreneo 2013). As one seasoned union activist, turned migrant organiser, noted, “It was the start of what they called ‘Endo’ [end of contract]. After five months, you are out [because work becomes regularised at six months]. Then, you have to apply again”.¹⁸ Workers

who were once highly organised and unionised were thus effectively transformed into a flexible and increasingly precarious labour force. It was within this context that survival became almost impossible and labour migration began on a massive scale. Over a third (35.8%) of the approximately 15,000 households in Bagong Barrio now depend on the remittances sent by family members who are working overseas (Migrante International n.d.), and community organisers estimate that between 60% and 70% of households have a relative who has worked abroad at some point in time.

Two long-term residents describe leaving Bagong Barrio during the 1980s.¹⁹ Roberto left in 1988 to work in Jeddah, soon being promoted from washer to foreman in the laundry of a hospital, which he described as a “research center, a hospital for the rich”. His promotion reflected his employer’s recognition of his skill: “They saw what I could do, how much knowledge I had”. Trained as an electrician, Luis departed the Philippines in 1984 to do maintenance work in a hospital of the Ministry of National Defence in Saudi Arabia. In Luis’ words: “doesn’t matter if you want it or not. Expenses are increasing, your salary decreasing ... I had no other options”. In the first months, he said, “sadness really defeated me. It was in Saudi where I learned the saying of workers: ‘Welcome to this prison without bars’”. Both worked as OFWs for the rest of their working lives—28 years for Luis and 26 years for Roberto—on a continuous series of two-year contracts. Roberto returned to the Philippines only four times during these years because concerns about money consumed him when he came home, especially expectations that he bring gifts and treat his family to gifts during his stay:

Whenever you want to go home, you think of money. When you arrive, you think of money ... As long as I send what they need here, it doesn’t matter so much if I come here ... In my 26 years abroad, I went home four times. I don’t regret it. I don’t regret it. Because why? You will go home and there are people and things you love, yes. But even that causes you great pain.

Working in stable, responsible (and in the case of Roberto, supervisory) jobs in prestigious institutions in a relatively wealthy country (ranked 34 in the UN Human Development Index in 2013) for much of their working lives at great personal sacrifice, neither earned enough to support their families in the Philippines. From Roberto: “I worked hard [as supervisor] even though my salary was not high and not low. It was just enough. Hand to mouth”. From his wife: “It’s not enough even if I know how to budget already. Truthfully, I also helped somewhat. And my employer easily loaned me some money. Once, I borrowed 5,000 [~\$140 CDN]”. Roberto’s wife worked as a seamstress in a nearby garment factory once her youngest child entered secondary school in 2002 (and she continued to work there until the factory closed): “By the mercy of god, things worked out that when the factory closed, my children were finished with college”. Her body bears the traces of that work: one foot was injured from years of working at sewing machines. She described borrowing money from her employer when her electricity was cut off, pawning jewellery sent by her husband, and an elaborate system of promissory notes to ensure that her three daughters could write their exams at school:

I would pawn the jewellery just so I have something to give so they could take their exams. I would pay tuition fees for two. Then, what will happen next is I will write a promissory note for the other one. Then, he [her husband] will send money, and I will pay the tuition of the one who gave the promissory note. Then, it will be time again to pay for the other one's tuition.

And so on. The same was true for Luis's family. His wife Beth recounted that:

The money he sent was able to help but it was also not that big and I had to budget it in the right way. Everything was budgeted. I already set aside the tuition of my children. The same with their allowance every month. All money I got, I stapled and divided. The money to pay for the electricity, water, tuition, transportation, allowance, school projects. You couldn't do anything beyond that. You couldn't subtract anything from that.

She worked in a range of informal jobs:

Imagine in a day, in the morning I sold dried fish. Then, I would do the laundry for someone. At 3 pm, I would start selling [fish] again. At night, you know that Shell gasoline station over there, I will sell *Balut*. That SM [nearby shopping mall], I couldn't enter that ... I told him [her husband], I teased him: "That SM, I will get lost in it". How would you enter it when all your money is already stapled?

In 2014, Roberto was sent home permanently by the Saudi government because of his age: "The company let me go because of Saudisation. A policy of the government. You can't overstay and I was already 65. They asked me to go home". The same was true for Luis who was sent home at age 60, the national retirement age in Saudi Arabia: "I don't want to brag about myself", he said, "but [my employers] really didn't want me to go". In Manila, there are no jobs for either man, and although Luis has a number of health concerns, he is thinking of leaving again: "They say, there's an age limit. You're old, right? But, really your body can still work. We can't do anything [here] because there are so many Filipinos who are unemployed". Of his current health concerns: "I think that's what happens when you really do not have anything else to do. Your body will desire to work because you got used to. That's what I would consider my experience with work". Rendered disposable workers in the Philippines in the 1980s, literally exhausted through lifetimes of working in Saudi Arabia, they are further abandoned as returning OFWs: old, unemployed, and in ill health, with limited savings towards the future (see also Santos 2016).

Outsourcing Precarity

Filomeno Aguilar (2009:106) writes of the house an OFW builds in their home community in the Philippines that it "neither denies or occludes nor discloses and articulates" the contradictions of migrant labour and the exploitation experienced by the OFW. Migrante organisers express their frustration about the opacity of this exploitation more directly:

From those we interviewed, we learned that most of them don't know what's going on with their family members abroad. Of course, because they are told that everything is okay. Like that. But, one *Tatay* [father] we organized said [in a public forum], "Those

are lies". He said that a mother whose head is pushed into the toilet by the employer will always tell her children that everything is okay because she doesn't want them to know. She's just covering it up so her family will not worry. There will be a few who would tell but that's rare. This is why families here have high expectations from the people who go abroad. They don't know how hard the life is abroad. Families that expect remittances, they don't know ... they don't remember how big the sacrifices are.²⁰

Residents in Bagong Barrio go to some of the most dangerous destinations available to OFWs. Most of the women OFWs (about half of the OFWs in the community) work as domestic servants for wealthy families in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Libya, Bahrain, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as more favoured destinations in Canada and the United States. According to the United Nation's International Labour Organization, domestic workers are some of the most likely workers to face abuse and exploitation in their place of work, and the International Trade Union Confederation (2014) estimates that 2.4 million domestic workers face conditions of slavery in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries alone. As another kind of dangerous occupation, Filipinos comprise a large number of private military contract personnel servicing other national militaries in various armed conflicts in the Middle East. For instance, as reported in *Private Warriors*, a Frontline (2005) PBS documentary, of the 200,000 military contractors hired by Kellogg Brown & Root (a Halliburton subsidiary and the United States' largest military logistical support provider) during the US-led invasion of Iraq, 50,000 Filipinos worked as weathermen, cooks, carpenters, and mechanics (see Lee and Pratt 2012; Singer 2007). The Philippine Overseas Employment Agency issues periodic bans on deployment of OFWs to particular countries, a running indicator of the danger zones in which OFWs are working.²¹

Located in Saudi Arabia, Luis was not involved directly in armed conflict but he experienced the First Gulf War as a civilian with responsibilities in relation to chemical warfare through his job at a hospital for the Saudi Ministry of Defense. He was not able to return home for four years at that time because of concerns about safety:

During that time, it was the first attack of the Iraqis on Kuwait. One night, there was a meeting with all workers at the hospital. No one could go home. It wasn't safe they said ... Who would not be afraid? Our first orientation was about the weapons Saddam used at that time. Chemical war. We were afraid because we were told that they had five kinds of weapons to kill ... We were very afraid of that. They first taught us how to use the injections issued to us. We were also given chemical suits. Gas mask. Who would not be afraid if you were given those things, right? ... That was our job: we had to seal everything. Even air conditioners ... Once, when we were at the villa where we lived, there was a missile dropped on the base. We were far from the base but all the glass in our villa shattered because of the impact of the bomb. Don't say you aren't going to cry if you experience that.

Lita's experience as a domestic helper in Kuwait was of an entirely different order of violence. As one example, caring for the "children" of a retired general, the 21-year-old son would steal into her room, take her panties, masturbate on them (as well as his own clothes), and return them to her to wash. As another: the food that her employers made available to her dated from the last time the family had employed

a domestic worker and had been frozen for at least two years: “When you touch it, you’d think it’s still fresh, but when you thaw it out and put it in the water, it will just crumble. That’s what I ate. And my rice stocked in the bodega had worms in it. That’s why I just ate the bread mostly. If you wash the rice, you will just get so many worms”. After two months of this she returned to her agency. Discovering that she had purchased a cell phone with her savings, the agent destroyed the phone, hitting her face as he threw it at her. She was made to strip to her underwear and wait standing in a cubicle (disallowed from sitting) for 16 hours. After five days, she was sent to another employer, whose previous domestic helper had just been repatriated. After the efforts of her mother and Migrante, Lita was also repatriated from this employer to the Philippines. A second trip to Malaysia was no less disastrous, financially perhaps more so. Lita was illegally recruited and arrived in Malaysia with a tourist visa. There she was forced to relinquish her identity papers to employers and pay what she owed the illegal recruiter and her employers who promised to file for her official working visa. Lita worked day and night with barely anything to eat. After two months of not receiving any salary, she went on a hunger strike and lied that her mother in the Philippines had filed a legal case against her employers. They bought her a ticket, put her in jail for a night and took her to airport. Lita returned home after three months, financially destitute, with so little money that she was forced to walk home from the airport. She did not go straight to her house but rather to the house of her uncle, where she recuperated for three days. When she finally went home late one night, she cried when she saw her children. Her children, on the other hand, were angry because she came home empty handed.

As much as these experiences are known, residents in Bagong Barrio develop an almost banal, running acquaintance with them. Tala, for instance, aged 17, communicated a matter of fact relationship to her cousin’s circumstances:

My cousin was working [in bars] as a GRO [Guest Relations Officer]²² here in the Philippines before. Now, of course, she was not earning enough and she can’t work that way forever. She dared to leave the country because she couldn’t provide. Then she went to Dubai. No one knows what her job is. We were all surprised then when she called to tell us she’s in jail. I think that was last year. When she called, I was about to ask her to send me something, “*Ate*, buy me a t-shirt”. Then my aunt said, “How would she buy that for you if she’s in jail? *Hala!* She’s in jail”. My aunt said that her visa and papers were confiscated and hidden. Of course, if you get caught doing something and you don’t have your documents, you will be put in jail. When [my aunt and cousin] finally got to talk, that was the time my cousin was just released. She was crying, she wanted to come home. But, of course, because she couldn’t find a good job here, she went back to Dubai to take chances again. She was here briefly. She was here for a week. Then she was gone. [Interviewer: How did your family take it?] Of course, if it’s your relative, you really worry. However, everyone who lives here is poor and having a difficult time. They can only focus on one thing. For example, on work.

In the case of Beth, asked casually whether her two daughters were OFWs, she replied:

My eldest daughter is in Saudi. She’s a nurse. Then my other one, she went abroad too. She studied computer science but she took CSSD. Medical sterilisation. Sterilisation of all

medical instruments in the hospital. But, she only stayed there for a year. She encountered a problem there, but she was able to get out. If she wasn't able to do that, maybe she'd be decapitated.

Further questioning revealed that her daughter had become pregnant. The daughter's boyfriend, also an OFW, killed himself, but her family was able to extract her from Saudi Arabia to return to give birth in the Philippines. Her mother recalled:

Of course, she cried and cried. I told her not to worry. Whatever the problem is, we can solve it. We can do it. Even her sister was crying. I told them "Don't panic. Let's be light. What's most important is that we are the ones to resolve this problem". They eventually understood.

Cruel Optimism and Education for the Future

In a classic ethnography of the reproduction of working class culture, in the 1970s Paul Willis studied the oppositional culture of British working class male youths at schools ("having a laff" and rejecting and ridiculing educational aspirations): their laughter, he argued, lasted just long enough to deliver them through the factory gates as manual workers (Willis 1977). In another time and place, where unionised jobs have vanished, the opposite—that is, diligence and ambitious academic goals—perversely has much the same effect: in this case, of delivering university graduates in Bagong Barrio to OFW jobs. Such is the responsabilisation of the entrepreneurial subject and the cruelty of the fantasy of upward social mobility through post-secondary education in our neoliberal times (Berlant 2011). This cruelty is lived viscerally although perhaps distinctively in Bagong Barrio, inflected as it is within the obligations and sociability of family.

Alongside lives of improvised survival and creative coping, OFWs lead lives of careful management and investment in the self and children's future. After using remittances for survival, and in line with studies of remittance expenditures²³ (Advincula-Lopez 2005; Bagasao et al. 2004; Tabuga 2007a, 2007b; Yang 2005), OFWs in Bagong Barrio tend to invest what they can in the educations of their children: "Almost all [OFWs] start with the education".²⁴ When asked how she used the money sent by Roberto, his wife said simply: "For everything. For my children's education. I focused all my attention on sending my children to school ... Sometimes, I ask myself, how did I do that? How did I send them all to school?". Roberto would listen on the cellphone from Saudi Arabia at the graduation ceremonies of each of his three daughters:

I told him: "Her name is about to be called. I will let you listen." ... I told him: "When her name gets called you will hear it." I always cry when I remember. I always did that: "Listen, your child is being called." We did that for the first, second, third, until all of them finished.

In the case of Roberto's family, his college-educated daughters continue to live in their rented family home in Bagong Barrio, along with their husbands and a grandchild. For many others, college educations open the door for new generations of OFWs.

Yoly, a co-founder and current board member of what is now a large community cooperative savings and loan society (worth roughly 80 million pesos in assets or ~C\$2 million), also observed (and as a board member of the coop she is in a

good position to make this observation) that the first thing OFWs spend their remittances on is “their children’s schooling.”²⁵ They won’t forget their children’s school”. She spoke of how hard she and her neighbours worked to pay for their children’s educations. One neighbour “really had a hard time sending her children to school. She would do the laundry. Feed pigs. All kinds of hardships she endured. She would work as a domestic helper”. The nursing educations that this neighbour was able to buy for her daughters through such hard work have allowed them to migrate to the United States and sponsor their mother to join them. In this case they were apparently successful in the education/migration gamble. In Yoly’s case, she used all of her savings to educate her daughters, one as a nurse and another as a physiotherapist: “That [paying for their education] was no joke”. But “whatever you sow, you will reap. If you sow something not good, then you will not reap anything from that. That’s my principle. I sowed a good thing. I sent my children to school. Sacrifice”. Two of her three daughters are OFWs, one now a permanent resident in Canada through the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), the other working as a physiotherapist on cruise ships.

Their migration was strategised through a careful assessment of risk and benefit:

Not everyone who goes abroad succeeds and gets a good life. Like that, maybe [another neighbour’s] daughter did not have a good experience. What do you expect from Saudi, right? That’s why I told my daughter when she was thinking of going to Saudi. I stopped her. I didn’t want her to do that. She applied to Singapore. She passed. But, remember Flor Contemplacion,²⁶ right? I don’t want that either. She applied to Australia. She passed. I told her, “Don’t leave unless it’s Canada because my siblings are there. They could see you.” It’s different when you have relatives in the place you are going too. So, that’s how it happened.

Yoly’s third daughter took a two-year course to qualify for the LCP but “was very nervous during the interview” and did not qualify for the program. She now lives in the Philippines with her husband in a farming household and “she doesn’t have a good life. Whenever a child doesn’t listen to the parent, that’s what they will get”. In line with expectations of the entrepreneurial neoliberal subject, this daughter is held responsible for her fate:

I told my two granddaughters. “Look at your mother; she has a different life compared to your two aunts. Do you want to repeat your mother’s life? From whom would you ask for money?” It’d be good if my life lasts longer [because they can rely on her for financial support], but I don’t know. “Who would you ask: your aunts? Your aunts would also grow tired of you, especially if they see you are not making anything of your life”.

Dedicated investment in children’s education, therefore, in many cases buys privileged access to overseas employment and serves—for better or worse—to (re)produce the next generation as labour exports. As Tadiar (2013:36) notes, through their remittances, OFWs “sustain the conditions for a constantly self-renewing ‘stagnant surplus population’ in the Philippines”.²⁷ This system of renewal, it needs to be stressed, meets the needs of other wealthier countries for well-educated, low-paid flexible workers and the offshoring of the costs of social reproduction. In a cruel twist of fate, these highly educated workers are often deskilled in the process of migration (Pratt 2012), or returned home (as in the case of Luis and Roberto) depleted after lifetimes of

work in another country. At the same time, the inability to secure overseas employment may be interpreted by family members as personal failure. Rather than a dichotomy between forced migration and economic migration, and between the entrepreneurial neoliberal subject and those who lead disposable lives, the categories blur into each other. Carefully planned investment in the self and household enables migration that is both forced and chosen and in many cases is a means of reproducing conditions of disposability in the next generation: distinctions between these categories make little sense when viewed on the ground in Bagong Barrio. Criticisms that circulate in the Philippines of the families of OFWs' failure to responsibly invest remittances thus seem in many cases to be grossly misplaced insofar as careful investment and sacrifice for the future go hand in hand with the production and reproduction of disposability and entrepreneurial surplus populations.

Imelda's Promise

When Yoly considered her street alone, she estimated that well over 10 houses have been built by OFWs. Of the big house across the street: "Their child is working for a ship. They have a good gate. Stainless steel". Sitting in her house several streets away, Beth informally enumerated the OFWs on her street: "Really, almost everyone on this street". Asked how having so many OFWs has changed Bagong Barrio, she answered somewhat incredulously: "First of all, do you think houses here would be big like that if people didn't go abroad? No". Beth herself oversaw the construction of her house while her husband, Luis, worked in Saudi Arabia. She bought the materials for her house gradually with portions of the remittances sent home: "First I bought hollow bricks, until I was able to collect 650 hollow blocks. Next were the steel pipes. I also asked how much wood I would need". To assess her needs, Beth would simply count: "This wall, how many inches?". She assembled nails, wire, plywood and metal, and then hired her brother to build their concrete-block house.

While Aquilar (2009) is undoubtedly right that migrant spending on houses in the Philippines has rich cultural meanings that exceed a purely economic analysis, in Bagong Barrio the house as an economic investment and asset was ever present. When Luis returned from Saudi Arabia and wanted to start a business, his wife Beth said: "I told him, if we have a business, what will happen to us? Because there's no certainty in that right?". Instead, they secured land across the street and built a house for their daughter who works as an OFW in the Middle East: "At least, that's already something that is built. You can already earn something from it right away". They are currently renting it to a family and she reasons that this could become a main (though not the sole) source of their income. Marilou, another long-term resident of Bagong Barrio, spoke of her neighbours doing likewise:

Meanwhile some already build third or fourth floors because their children work abroad. They will take advantage of the opportunity and rent space so they will get back what they invested. That's the system here. Just like the house over there. An OFW bought the rights to that house for 300,000 pesos [~C\$8300]. Rights only. There are one, two, three, four, five rooms. She's renting them all out as a source of income. She doesn't have other money at the moment. She's back home [from being an OFW] and at least she has this source of income.

Noting that working abroad for so many years “was really for the education of the children so they could finish college”, Roberto laments: “The saddest of all, however, is that we do not have a house. I couldn’t do both at the same time”.

As with education, housing is an unstable investment, in the first instance because many households are uncertain about their claims to land title.²⁸ The history of land titling in Bagong Barrio is complex and nebulous and defies any neat distinction between informal and formal or legal and illegal. Many residents trace this uncertainty back to the promises of tenure formalisation distributed by Imelda Marcos during her 1980 election campaign; her assurance of regularised land title (and provision of documentation) has proven unreliable. But those who qualified (by being married and employed and of sufficient age), and were fortunate to be counted in a later census (itself a somewhat hit or miss process), and who have surrendered these promissory titles to the NHA have obtained an uneasy claim to title. The NHA itself undertook seven phases of land titling from 1978 through 1979, prompted by Presidential Decree No. 1315 (26 March 1978) that made provision for 40 ha of privately owned land to be expropriated (through the state’s exercise of immanent domain) in Bagong Barrio for the purpose of redistribution to qualified squatter families. Provision was made for 40 million pesos to be appropriated from the National Treasury for this purpose.²⁹ The seeming arbitrariness of access to land title shifts attention from what Roy (2011) terms “slum ontologies” (i.e. urban informality as located in certain places) to analyses of sovereign power and its various negotiations in urban space.

A number with whom we spoke had paid fees to the NHA for decades to pay out their claim to title. However, actualising claims to land title has been a challenging prospect; in fact no one with whom we spoke could state definitively that they had land title, for varied reasons: the “mother title” for their block was still privately owned and the NHA had not yet purchased it to subdivide; discrepancies in the names on land and housing title documents; and difficulty disentangling ownership because of subdividing the occupancy rights in past years. The variety of problems is perhaps not surprising and points not only to the arbitrary nature of state power but the violence of this arbitrariness as lived experience. Hernando De Soto (2001:20) has claimed that exacting land title through the NHA has 168 steps, involving a matrix of 53 public and private agencies, and takes 13–25 years to accomplish. Further, each of these steps opens an opportunity for a “fixer”, a petty bureaucrat, who Tadiar (2009:204) characterises as an “adventurer” emerging “out of the urban excess” and “conditions of daily uncertainty and chance in employment and subsistence, dispossession and devaluation”. Yoly appears to have been a victim of such a fixer:

they haven’t given it to me because there are many requirements. We had to put it on record in the newspapers as proof that my husband died. We put it in the newspapers. My sibling and I did it together. I think it’s called a Transfer of Deeds. Ay, nothing came out of that either. We paid an extra 6,000 [pesos]. Nothing happened. So, the land should be under my name but it hasn’t been transferred. They told me so that it will be easier to do that, I should just pay 6,000 so they will be the ones to arrange it. I said, “Okay”. I paid 6,000. Nothing. The person I paid vanished. I was looking for this person who asked for the 6,000. I was asking for a receipt but they didn’t want to give me one.

While it may be true, as Tadiar (2009:208) argues, that such fixers can be viewed as a “product of postcolonial economic development” and thus lend a certain originality to a home-grown crony capitalism, this is cold comfort to residents of Bagong Barrio intent on securing land title.

Residents nonetheless keep a close eye on the lively housing market that currently exists (whether in occupancy rights and/or land title) in Bagong Barrio, where properties are bought, sold and rented regardless of their formal or legal status. From Beth: “Here, the value of land has increased. Honestly. Before, you could buy land here in the hundreds of thousands. Now, millions! There’s three million! Two million! The lowest probably is 1.5 million”. As the appraised value of much of the real property in the area has increased by over 1000% from 1989 to 2014, the cost of NHA securing land title has increased exponentially (see Figure 2).³⁰ Additional pressure comes from an aggressive strategy of global city making and the liberalisation of the land market in Metro Manila. Extraordinary land inflation has taken place in the metropolitan area, and it has been reported that land prices rose from 6000% to 8000% in some parts of central Manila between 1987 and 1996 (Shatkin 2004). Bagong Barrio thus appears ripe for private investment.

So too, as David Harvey (2008:36) argues with respect to land-titling among the urban poor in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, even if land title is cleared, “the problem is that the poor, beset with income insecurity and frequent financial difficulties, can easily be persuaded to trade in that asset”. Indeed, the practice of *Sangla/tira* or “pawn-rent” was identified in Bagong Barrio as “the fad here right now”.³¹ Migrants are often forced to pawn their houses or occupancy rights to secure funds to try their chances at working abroad as OFWs, or to assemble funds in emergencies. In Elsie’s words:

It’s the owner who is looking for the *Sangla/Tira*. For example, they need the money so bad. They need it now. 200,000 [~C\$5700] let’s say. You have to pay that amount right away and you need to sign the documents first at the Barangay Hall. They [present occupants] would leave that house right away and the next person moves in.

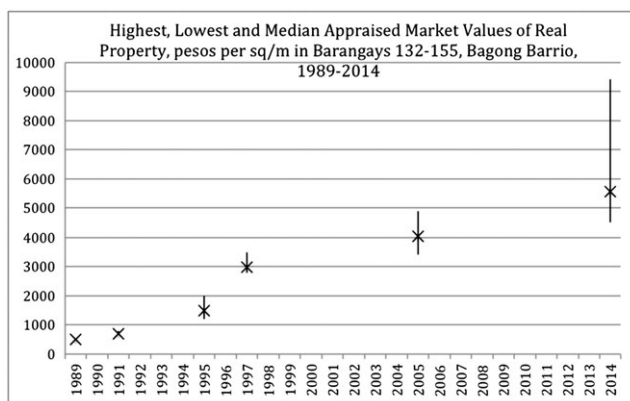


Figure 2: Real property inflation in Bagong Barrio West, 1989–2014 (source: Department of Finance, Republic of the Philippines, DO 17-89; 6-91; 32-95; 8-97; 29-05; 086-14, Barangays 132–155 Caloocan City)

Mobilising informal properties as collateral to pay the costs associated with overseas migration is a risky enterprise. Marilou spoke of two different neighbours and a sibling who lost in this particular migration gamble, one forced to sell his house after nine years working in Korea: now “he just loiters” in the neighbourhood. An OFW who worked in the Middle East “for a long time” and bought a house for income after returning to Bagong Barrio, within just one year, had used up her savings and was pawning her house, one room at a time. Another OFW, a child whose mother built their house as a migrant worker, was pawning a room to put some nephews through school. “That’s what I don’t understand with OFWs here”, says Marilou, “They’re pawning everything”. There are, of course, some beneficiaries of this misfortune. For instance, Marilou’s brother was able to purchase his house because someone pawned it to him and couldn’t pay him back. Her brother “just added a little bit more so they were able to buy it for 220,000 for 30 sq/m. But, you have to remember that if you buy a property, you need to check if all documents are in order because eventually it will be a problem for you”. In their community profile of Bagong Barrio, Migrante identifies this system of pawn-rent as one of the major issues presently confronting migrants in the community. All told, it is no wonder that Marilou ponders, telling of a returned OFW surviving on rents from her house: “But the question mark [remains]: when, until when?”. Whether by design or not, the fate of residents’ two most valuable assets: education and real estate, bear testimony to Tadiar’s (2009) claims about the continuous “liquidation” of the potential capital of the urban poor.

What Falls Away

We end with one life story that both reproduces and exceeds narratives of entrenched precarity and disposability. Tala, who is 17 years old, is deeply rooted in Bagong Barrio. Although, as earlier recounted, her cousin has worked as an OFW in Dubai and was in fact jailed there, her family’s history of migration, propelled by the same precarity that leads so many Filipinos to work abroad, is internal to the Philippines. Her grandmother was among the first residents of Bagong Barrio in the late 1960s, and her father says that her “mother’s navel is buried here. She doesn’t want to leave”. Desperation led her family to leave on one occasion when Tala was seven years old. They moved to Pampanga, where the children collected scrap metal and plastics from the river and loaded trucks at the market to supplement the family’s meagre income: “Whenever I think about that time, I think that’s such a hard thing to do. It’s like when you’re going to eat, you think ‘I better eat a lot because there’s a chance that I won’t be able to eat the next time’”. When she was nine or ten they returned to Bagong Barrio: “And we have never left since”. “We are happy we live in Bagong Barrio”, Tala says:

The only problem is if Papa doesn’t work and drive [a jeepney] for the day we have to go through the day with only 70 pesos [~\$2CDN] from what my mother makes peeling garlic. Mama figures it out. She’ll buy the 40 pesos per kilo kind of NFA rice. Then the remaining 30 pesos she uses to buy dried fish or eggs. She’ll do that so all [eight] of us can eat. But there are times when we do not eat.

Tala likes:

Imagining things. I would buy a house just for my family, a house this high, or with this color. Everything I imagine! I want my house to have at least four floors. I want it high. On the first floor, we have a small store or a grocery. Anything as long as it's some sort of business to help my family. Then, we would occupy the floors above. We would all have our own rooms. Where do I want to build this house? Here in Bagong Barrio. Because it's where my lola grew up, grew old and died. I don't want us to live in an executive village [middle class gated community]. I grew up like this. Why would I go to a village? I still want to be in Caloocan [City] ... My family is always included in the plan. I want their lives to be better when my life is better. I want us all to be successful together. If I have a better life, I do want to go to places like Canada and the US so I could just experience them. I want to go to Paris. I want to go the Eiffel Tower and take a selfie.

Tala's interview was in many ways surprising, not the least because of the ways that both she and her mother had acted out their economic desperation in relation to migration in our previous meetings. Visiting Ate Marilou one day, we met Tala's mother and younger sisters in the lane outside, where Tala's married sister sat peeling garlic. From fieldnotes that day:

Her mother kept telling her two year old [who was playing with an umbrella] to take the umbrella over to Caleb and I and to call us mother and father. When I mentioned this to Vanessa she said that Tala had said that she wants to take a picture with Caleb and I and post it on Facebook indicating that we are her mother and father.

Tala's interview, however, revealed an entirely different aspirational geography. The provinces hold no allure: they are the site of her life (at age seven) as a garbage picker and a scene of hunger. Nor does she aspire to a middle class executive village in Manila. Canada and the US would be nice to visit and experience, and the Eiffel tower is the scene for a touristic selfie. Where she aspires to be is where she is, in Bagong Barrio, where her lola grew up, grew old and died. As she elaborates her fantasy, what she aspires to is a house in Bagong Barrio with space at street level for a business that will sustain her family.

But for a seeming fluke of fate this dream would be within reach. Perhaps her lola did not take the fake certificate from Imelda Marcos, or perhaps she was absent the day when the census takers came to establish and record claims to land title—the fate, we were told by a number of long-term residents. We do know that Tala's family is unlucky enough to live in an area for which the “mother title” has not yet been purchased by the NHA. What is excessive to these conditions of disposability, however, is her love for her lola, her concern for her father's health and her tenacious hold on her family's history in Bagong Barrio. She can imagine the defence of her space:

If it gets demolished, what will I do? I would protect our place! I think they will lose, the demolition team. Other residents in Bagong Barrio have guns. When their houses get demolished: Pak! It's possible that everyone dies. It won't happen: they won't be able to demolish us completely.

Her family is always included in her plan and her desire is for them to be successful *together* in the *same* place. A sweeping narrative of disposability and wasted lives

does not quite absorb these aspirations, her insistent forms of life-making and her fierce claims to place. Her claims to Bagong Barrio and her deep desire to do so are a radical disruption of a pervasive culture of migration, as disruptive for audiences in the Philippines as those in the global North. She desires to stay put in a troubled neighbourhood, in a city known for its pollution, noise, congestion, poverty, corruption and elite fantasies of cosmopolitan escape (Benedicto 2014; Tadiar 2009). This desire falls away from standard accounts and is well worth remembering.

Concluding Thoughts

Bagong Barrio residents have shared fragments of their life stories, which bring us close to their experiences of lifetimes of disposability and the production of entrepreneurial surplus populations. Collectively, their stories are an indictment of multiple state failures under neoliberalism and a chronicle of the respatialisation of family and work lives as a strategy for survival. Wealthy nations fail to provide even modest livelihoods for migrant families who work for lifetimes within their borders. They slough off the costs of social reproduction to a community where most of the available employment opportunities have been relentlessly flexibilised, where the state's promises of housing security have failed to materialise, and where support for social reproduction such as education have been (to a considerable extent) privatised. We witness extraordinary planning and investment in the reproduction of self and family. And while this resembles the self-actualising neoliberal subject, it is a subject fully embedded within the family and one that yields few of the rewards that we have come to expect of such diligent care of the self. Rather, in many cases it produces yet another generation of labour migrants, of surplus entrepreneurs. In what Butler (2015) terms an "operative contradiction", residents of Bagong Barrio are both indispensable and dispensable to the Philippine state as remittance-sending "heroes of the nation" whose heroism fails to secure livelihoods beyond precarity.

Things do fall away from this account. From the vantage point of Bagong Barrio, we can see that neoliberalism and the Philippine state's systematic reliance on a surplus population as a liquid asset has been constructed policy by policy, law by law, presidential decree by presidential decree, broken promise by broken promise. Rather than being cut from one cloth, it has been woven together from many strands of policy, law, regulation, and social practice. Against this, we also heard about the inventiveness of residents: the creation of a community cooperative savings and loan society, and more individual strategies of survival and job creation, such as inserting oneself into the labour and housing markets as a *sangla tira* agent or providing the service of driving children to school in a side-car for a small fee. There is nothing new about noting the self-reliance of squatter and informal communities but in a context in which these communities are "demonized and positioned as the city's 'abject'" in popular discourse (Tolentino 2001:167), such that demolition of their community and displacement is rendered unremarkable and perhaps even virtuous, representations of hard work, resourcefulness, saving and self-discipline do important political work. We also heard stories of continuing,

ongoing commitments to collective struggle and family life, that is, of a good deal of labour and life that exists and thrives between the individual and the population. Indeed, Migrante embodies the former through their organising there and elsewhere. As well, we heard, again and again, of commitments to staying put in Bagong Barrio, of rights to this place in the city. In this, residents live lives somewhere between and excessive to discourses of victims and agents or individuals and populations, lives that unsettle and blur binaries or dichotomous categories that run through discussions of forced and economic migration, and the neoliberal responsibilised subject as opposed to disposable surplus populations. We would do well to listen closely to these life stories for unpredictable openings and new political possibilities.

We offer this analysis to Migrante in their efforts to dismantle the Philippines' structural dependency on OFW labour. Evidence that the "ordinary, chronic, and cruddy" suffering of the OFW is unlikely to be redeemed in the future forces ethical and political questioning in the present. That is, now.

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Endnotes

¹ Interview: M, September 2015.

² Interview: A, September 2015. Also Migrante Community Profile.

³ Interview: Y, September 2015. Many of those from Intramuros came originally from the Visayas region, for straightforward geographical reasons: "Because it [Intramuros] was near the pier" (M, September 2015).

⁴ Interview: M, July 2014.

⁵ *The Manila Times* (2005).

⁶ Our discussion of disposability emerges out of broader and now extensive debates about disposable and wasted lives under conditions of increasing precarity. See, for example, *Antipode* (2015), *Histories of Violence* (2016), Mbembe (2003) and Povinelli (2011).

⁷ In the summer and fall of 2014, we produced our testimonial play, *Nanay*, in collaboration with Migrante in Bagong Barrio, a community of the urban poor in Caloocan City, the third most populated of 12 cities that constitute Metropolitan Manila. Migrante guided us to and within the barrio because the advocacy group saw the play as an opportunity to organise youth and families within this key migrant-sending community (see Pratt et al. 2015). As part of this process, we interviewed long-term residents and youth (who performed the play) in order to translate, rework and resituate *Nanay* within this context (Johnston and Pratt 2010; Pratt and Johnston 2013). This was followed by an additional period of fieldwork in August and September 2015 to pursue the issues addressed here. It should be noted that as researchers we are positioned differently from each other, and solicited and elicited testimony in different ways, most always in the company of a migrant

organiser. Johnston and Pratt are white, Anglo academics while Banta is a Filipino native of Manila with a history of participation in migrant organising. Some interviews were conducted entirely in Tagalog and later translated, others in a mixture of English and Tagalog. Those we interviewed were variably involved with Migrante: some fully committed, others finding their way to the organisation, others associated only tangentially. In some cases, Migrante organisers were hearing life-stories for the first time and thus the interviews were a research opportunity for their organisation as well. Many of the interviews were conducted for the purpose of developing the community play and residents understood that their testimony would inform the play and likely be integrated into it. In this sense, they understood themselves to be testifying to their community as much as being interviewed by us.

⁸ Writing in the context of India, Vinay Gidwani and Rajyashree Reddy (2011:1653) argue that when surplus humanity “cannot be expelled ... it is simply abandoned, thrust into a zone of indistinction where it is regulated but not considered worth redeeming”.

⁹ This was an increase of 6.4% from the previous year and exceeded government targets by 1.4%.

¹⁰ Adding further complexity, this entrepreneurial subject is frequently embedded within a discourse of Christian martyrdom, what Muehlebach has termed “Catholicized neoliberalism” (2013, quoted in Bautista 2015).

¹¹ We thank Jessica Dempsey for this phrasing, as an addition to Marx’s refinement of distinctive surplus populations (floating, latent, stagnant, etc.).

¹² We cannot make claims about the representativeness of those with whom we spoke. Migrante made an effort to introduce us to different kinds of community members: to three older residents with deep roots in the community, either in organising or in the community-based financial cooperative, and to five OFW families. These informants were able to speak about others on their street and in the neighbourhood. We also interviewed Migrante organisers who generously shared their own research and experience in the neighbourhood, and five youths from the area who were involved in the play and newly involved with Migrante. We were able to return to interview some of the informants a number of times and to attend Migrante forums in the community.

¹³ Tadiar herself is fully aware of this; indeed this is her point.

¹⁴ As Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) have noted, dispossession has two distinct meanings: it can refer to processes by which people are disowned or abjected (i.e. the types of disposability under discussion here) or to being dislodged from one’s self as an autonomous being. A disposition to dispossession in the second sense, they argue, can be a means towards taking responsibility for one’s position in the world in relation to others. Since lives in Bagong Barrio are intimately connected to more privileged lives elsewhere, linking these two forms of dispossession is an urgent political and ethical task. Our hope is that coming close to individual lives in Bagong Barrio will nurture this second sense of dispossession as disposition.

¹⁵ Interview: B, August 2014.

¹⁶ Interview: A, August 2015 (“*Oo mga 80s. Kahit 90s. Nabasihan na to*”).

¹⁷ The Herrera Law amended the Philippine Labour Code of 1974 to create the legal grounds for contractual work arrangements, effectively breaking unionised labour and workers’ association. Herrera introduced the concept of Assumption of Jurisdiction, “special” measures that curtail the workers’ right to protest, allowing for the swift deployment of police and/or military to suppress and “resolve” industrial disputes. Former Sen. Ernesto Herrera has subsequently argued that his law has been misunderstood and that an earlier martial-law era Article 106, Presidential Decree 422, was already used by the Department of Labor and Employment to justify job contracting.

¹⁸ Interview: A, July 2014.

¹⁹ Interviews: Roberto, September 2015; Bayani, September 2014.

²⁰ Interview: A, September 2014.

²¹ See Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2016).

²² GROs work in bars soliciting “Ladies’ Drinks” for which they get a monetary kickback from the bar owner.

²³ In a 2015 third-quarter survey of the Central Bank of the Philippines, a survey of 563 OFW households revealed that 71% of households directed at least some of their remittances towards

education, and that education was the most frequent use of remittances, after “food and other household needs” (Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas 2015). In 2015, a portal was launched by a social enterprise named *Edukasyon.ph* to assist OFWs searching for courses, schools and scholarships. The chief executive officer is quoted as saying: “We understand how difficult it is for our OFW parents to participate in the education planning of their children especially when they are miles away from them. Through *Edukasyon.ph* we give them an online and free way to find all the possible schools and courses offered which they can advise their children to take based on their interests, budget, and location” (GMA News Online 2015).

²⁴ Interview: M, September 2015.

²⁵ OFW expenditures on education have to be understood in the context of the inadequacy of public spending on education. The transition to a K-12 system (which involves introducing grades 11 and 12 to high school in the Philippines) and the creation of four educational tracks within grades 11–12 has exacerbated debate on the inadequacy of the public school system. In the National Capital Region, nine out of ten senior high schools (grades 11–12) are private (Tucay 2015). In the 2011–2016 Philippine Development Plan, it was estimated that the country lacked 113,000 classrooms and, despite efforts to correct this, only 60% of this classroom backlog has been remedied. The move to increase high school by two years (i.e. to add grades 11 and 12) has increased the shortage to an estimated 95,000 classrooms. The alignment of the Philippine educational program with the K-12 model has been highly controversial. The IBON Foundation has estimated that the country deployed 4500 workers abroad per day in 2014, far outpacing the 2800 average daily job creation domestically, and predicts that this situation will worsen under the K-to-12 program. The IBON Foundation ventures that the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood track that is being created as part of the restructuring of high school education and for which half of all students are destined in grades 11 and 12, is aimed to produce graduates that are readily employable by foreign companies that seek cheap labor (Tucay 2015). Our analysis suggests that the same may be true for many of those in the academic track, including those destined for and completing university degrees.

²⁶ Flor Contemplacion, while working as a domestic worker in Singapore, was accused of the murder of a Filipino domestic worker and the child under her care. She was eventually found guilty and hanged in Singapore in 1995. This prompted a global protest, and a response from the Philippine state (Republic Act 8042) aimed to better protect women migrants, a state response that has had mixed reception (Raphael 1997; Rodriguez 2010).

²⁷ The propensity for OFWs to spend remittances on education in ways that reproduces mass emigration has been a subject of sustained debate in the Philippines. In particular the concern is that remittances are not being funnelled into “real productive investments” and thus do little to correct the structural imbalances in the economy (Advincula-Lopez 2005:68).

²⁸ The threat of urban displacement is also ever present in Bagong Barrio. KADAMAY (the largest alliance of urban poor organisations in the country) reports plans to implement privatisation in the area, and the planned expansion of the surrounding transportation infrastructure that will lead to the demolition of many homes in Bagong Barrio. As another threat, the largest developer in Manila has been assembling (buying up) land in the area.

²⁹ See http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1978/pd_1315_1978.html Before implementation was complete, a minority of property owners applied successfully to be excluded from the Urban Land Reform Zone; see http://www.lawphil.net/judjuris/juri2000/apr2000/gr_107040_2000.html

³⁰ We note as well the conclusion advanced in the Technical Assistance Completion Report submitted to the Asian Development Bank in 2010, a report submitted with reference to a proposed project to assist the Philippine government in slum eradication and urban upgrading across Metro Manila. Quoting from the report: “Allocation of land for the urban poor is still a major bottleneck. Despite numerous presidential land declarations for the purpose of housing for the urban poor, these lands are not made available due to complicated titling procedures. There seems to be a lack of political will to improve the situation of informal settlements. Most LGUs (Local Government Units) pursue off-city resettlement of informal settlers as their preferred strategy, [and] perceive the problem of informal settlements rather as a burden than a development opportunity”.

³¹ Interview: E, August 2014.

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